

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L BEIRUT 0251

EXDIS

FROM CHARGE

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR, LE, OVIP
SUBJECT: PROPOSED VISIT BY SECRETARY-DESIGNATE VANCE TO LEBANON

1. FOREIGN MINISTER BOUTROS AND SECRETARY GENERAL OF FOREIGN MINISTRY NAJIB DAHDAH CALLED ME TO FOREIGN MINISTRY AT NOON JAN 20 TO ASK ABOUT NEWS REPORTS CONCERNING SECRETARY-DESIGNATE VANCE'S FORTHCOMING TRIP TO THE MIDDLE EAST. I SAID I HAD SEEN REPORTS BUT HAD RECEIVED NOTHING OFFICIAL FROM DEPARTMENT. DAHDAH SAID THAT BASED ON INFORMATION THEY HAD, IT APPEARS "HE IS LEAVING US ASIDE." BOTH BOUTROS AND DAHDAH SAID THAT IT WAS EXTREMELY IMPORTANT THAT LEBANON BE INCLUDED ON MR VANCE'S FORTHCOMING TRIP. A STOP IN LEBANON WOULD BE A CONCRETE SIGN OF FRIENDSHIP AND SUPPORT THAT WOULD BE NOTED BY ALL GROUPS IN LEBANON AND IN OTHER ARAB COUNTRIES AND WOULD BE WORTH FAR MORE THAN WORDS. ON OTHER HAND, IF LEBANON WERE NOT INCLUDED, IT WOULD BE INTERPRETED AS INDICATING A LACK OF INTEREST. DAHDAH SAID GOL WOULD WANT TO REVIEW WITH MR VANCE: 1) THE CURRENT SITUATION IN LEBANON; 2) ITS POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC FUTURE; AND 3) PROGRESS TOWARDS AN OVERALL MIDDLE EASTERN SETTLEMENT, IN WHICH LEBANON HAD A PARTICULAR INTEREST BECAUSE OF ITS PALESTINIAN PROBLEM.

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2. WHEN I RAISED THE QUESTION OF SECURITY, FOREIGN MINISTER BOUTROS SAID THEY HAD CONSIDERED THIS AND BELIEVED THERE WOULD BE NO PROBLEM. IN FACT, IF MR VANCE DID NOT COME, PRESIDENT SARKIS' EFFORTS TO RESTORE A FEELING OF CONFIDENCE WOULD BE JEOPARDIZED. BOUTROS PROPOSED THAT VANCE PARTY ARRIVE AT BEIRUT AIRPORT AND

PROCEED DIRECTLY FROM THERE TO PRESIDENTIAL PALACE AT BAABDA TO MEET WITH SARKIS, PRIME MINISTER AL-HOSS, AND FOREIGN MINISTER. DEPENDING ON SCHEDULE, GOL WOULD BE HAPPY TO HOST LUNCH AT BAABDA. VANCE PARTY WOULD THEN RETURN DIRECTLY TO THE AIRPORT WITHOUT PASSING THROUGH ANY OTHER SECTION OF THE CITY. ENTIRE STOP-OVER WOULD TAKE NO MORE THAN THREE OR FOUR HOURS. I REPEATED THAT I HAD RECEIVED NO OFFICIAL INFORMATION FROM WASHINGTON THAT MR VANCE WAS PLANNING AN EARLY TRIP TO THE MIDDLE EAST BUT PROMISED TO TRANSMIT THEIR VIEWS TO WASHINGTON IMMEDIATELY.

3. COMMENT. IF MR VANCE IS PLANNING A TRIP TO THE MIDDLE EAST, A STOP-OVER IN LEBANON WOULD BE TREMENDOUSLY HELPFUL TO PRESIDENT SARKIS. CURRENT RUMORS THAT THE COLLECTION OF HEAVY ARMS WAS NOT NEARLY AS COMPLETE AS ANNOUNCED IN THE PRESS AND THE DELAY IN GETTING LEBANON'S INTERNAL SECURITY FORCES RE-EQUIPPED AND BACK ON THE STREET HAVE WEAKENED SARKIS' PRESTIGE IN RECENT WEEKS. A VISIT BY MR VANCE WOULD STRENGTHEN THE PRESIDENT'S POSITION NOT ONLY IN LEBANON BUT THROUGHOUT THE ARAB WORLD.

4. FROM AN ADMINISTRATIVE POINT OF VIEW, POST BELIEVES WE CAN HANDLE THE REQUIREMENTS OF SUCH A VISIT, SINCE OUR ADMIN OFFICER HAS HAD SOME EXPERIENCE IN THIS FIELD. AS FOR SECURITY, SITUATION CONTINUES TO IMPROVE AND ASSUMING FULL COOPERATION OF ARAB DETERRENT FORCE AND GOL AUTHORITIES, WHICH WE BELIEVE WE WOULD HAVE, OUR CONFIDENTIAL

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PRELIMINARY JUDGMENT IS THAT ADEQUATE ARRANGEMENTS CAN BE MADE TO GET MR VANCE FROM THE AIRPORT TO BAABDA PALACE AND BACK SAFELY. WE THEREFORE RECOMMEND THAT IF MR VANCE IS PLANNING A TRIP TO THE MIDDLE EAST, A SHORT STOP IN LEBANON BE INCLUDED ON THE ITINERARY.
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